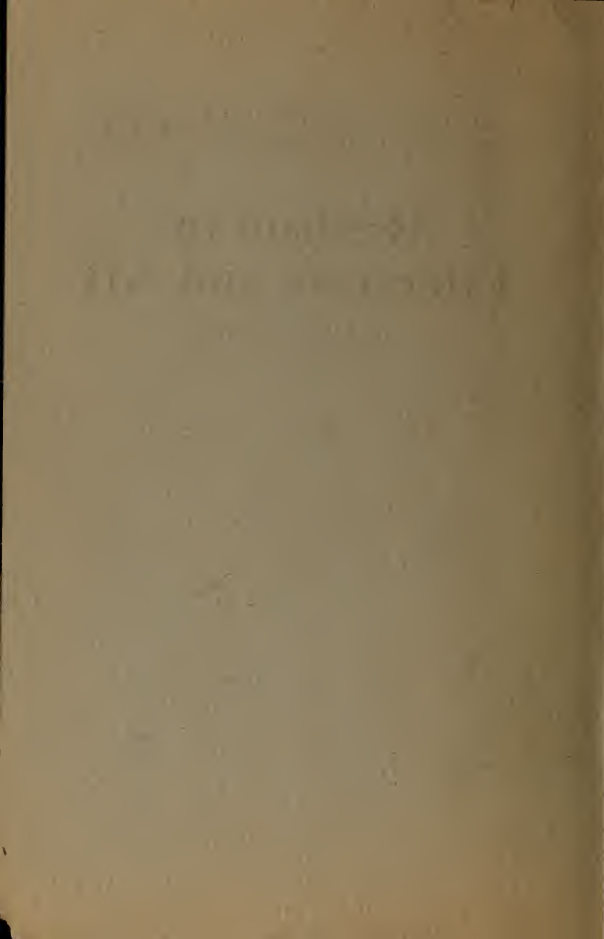


LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 934
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

**Realism in
Literature and Art**

Clarence Darrow



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HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY
GIRARD, KANSAS

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REALISM IN LITERATURE AND ART

Man is nature's last and most perfect work, but, however high his development or great his achievements, he is yet a child of the earth and the rude forces that have formed all the life that exists thereon. He cannot separate himself from the environment that gave him birth, and a thousand ties of nature bind him back to the long forgotten past and prove his kinship to all the lower forms of life that have sprung from that great universal mother, Earth.

As there is a common law of being, which controls all living things, from the aimless motions of the mollusk in the sea to the most perfect conduct of the best developed man, so all the activities of human life, from the movements of the savage digging roots, to the work of the greatest artist with his brush, are controlled by universal law, and are good or bad, perfect or imperfect, as they conform to the highest condition nature has imposed.

The early savage dwelt in caves and cliffs and spent his life in seeking food and providing a rude shelter from the cold. He looked upon the earth, the sun, the sea, the sky, the mountain peak, the forest and the plain, and all he saw and heard formed an impression on his brain and aided in his growth. Like a child he marveled at the storm and flood; he stood in awe as he looked upon disease and

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death; and to explain the things he could not understand, he peopled earth and air and sea with gods and demons, and a thousand other weird creations of his brain. All these mysterious creatures were made in the image of the natural objects that came within his view. The gods were men grown large and endowed with marvelous powers, while tree and bird and beast alike were used as models for a being far greater than any nature ever formed.

An angry god it was that made the rivers overrun their banks and leave destruction in their path; an offended god it was that hurled his thunderbolts upon a wicked world, or sent disease and famine to the sinning children of the earth: and to coax these rulers to be merciful to man, the weak and trembling children of the ancient world turned their minds to sacrifice and prayer. And the first clouded thoughts of these rude men that were transcribed on monument and stone, or carved in wood, or painted with the colors borrowed from the sun and earth and sky; in short, the first rude art was born to sing the praise, and tell the fame, and paint the greatness of the gods. But all of this was natural to the time and place; the graven images, the chiseled hieroglyphics and all this rude beginning of literature and art were formed upon what men saw and heard and felt, enlarged and magnified to fit the stature of the gods.

As the world grew older art was used to celebrate the greatness and achievements of kings and rulers as well as gods, and their tombs were ornamented with such decorations

as these early ages could create; and yet all literature and art were only for the gods and rulers of the world. Then, even more than now, wealth and power brought intellect to do its will, and all its force was spent to sing the praises of the rulers of the earth and air. The basis of all this art of pen and brush was the reality of the world, but this was so magnified and distorted for the base use of kings and priests that realism, in the true sense, could not exist. It would not do to paint a picture of a king resembling a man of flesh and blood, and of course a god must be far greater than a king. It would not do to write a tale in which kings and princes, lords and ladies, should act like men and women, else what difference between the ruler and the ruled? The marvelous powers that romance and myth had given to gods and angels were transferred to those of royal blood. The wonderful achievements of these kings and princes could be equaled only by the gods, and the poor dependents of the world, who lived for the glory of the great, were fed with legends and with tales that sung the praises of the strong.

Literature, sculpture, painting, music, and architecture, indeed all forms of art, were the exclusive property of the great, and the artist then, like most of those today, was retained to serve the strong and maintain the status of the weak. No one dreamed that there was any beauty in a common human life or any romance in a fact. The greatest of the earth had not yet learned to know that every life is a mystery and every death a tragedy; that the spark

of the infinite, which alone transforms clay to life, animates alike the breast of the peasant and the soul of the prince. The world had not yet learned that the ant-hill is as great as Mont Blanc, and the blade of grass as mysterious as the oak. It is only now that the world is growing so delicate and refined that it can see the beauty of a fact; that it is developing a taste so rare as to distinguish between the false and true; that it can be moved by the gentle breeze as well as by the winter's gale; that it can see greater beauty in a statement true to life, than in the inflated tales which children read.

Most of the art and literature the world has known has been untrue. The pictures of the past have been painted from the distorted minds of visionists, and the pliant brains of tools. They have represented impossible gods and unthinkable saints; angels and cherubs and demons; everything but men and women. Saints may be all right in their place, but a saint with a halo round his head was born of myth and not of art. Angels may be well enough, but all rational men prefer an angel with arms to an angel with wings. When these artists were not drawing saints and madonnas, they were spending their time in painting kings and royal knaves; and the pictures of the rulers were as unlike the men and women that they were said to represent as the servile spirit of the painter was unlike that of the true artist today. Of course an artist would not paint the poor; they had no clothes that would adorn a work of art, and no money nor favors that

could remunerate the toil. An ancient artist could no more afford to serve the poor than a modern lawyer could defend the weak.

After literature had so far advanced as to concern other beings than gods and kings, the authors of these ancient days told of wondrous characters endowed with marvelous powers; knights with giant strength and magic swords; princes with wondrous palaces and heaps of gold; travelers that met marvelous beasts and slew them in extraordinary ways; giants with forms like mountains, and strength like oxen, who could vanquish all but little dwarfs. Railroads were not invented in those early days, but travel was facilitated by the use of seven league boots. Balloons and telescopes were not yet known, but this did not keep favored heroes from peering at the stars or looking down from on high upon the earth; they had but to plant a magic bean before they went to bed at night, and in the morning it had grown so tall that it reached up to the sky; and the hero, although not skilled in climbing, needed simply to grasp the stalk and say, "Hitchety, hatchety, up I go. Hitchety, hatchety, up I go," and by this means soon vanish in the clouds. Tales of this sort used once to delight the world, and the readers half believed them true. We give them to children now, and the best of these view them with a half contempt.

The modern man does not enjoy these myths. He relishes a lie, but it must not be too big; it must be so small that, although he knows in his inmost soul that it is not true, he can yet half make himself believe it is not false. Most

of us have cherished a pleasing, waking dream, and have fondly clung to the sweet delusion while we really knew it was not life. The modern literary stomach is becoming so healthy that it wants a story at least half true; should the falsehood be too strong, it acts as an emetic instead of food. These old fairy tales have lost their power to charm, as the stories of the gods and kings went down before. They have lost their charm, for as we read them now, they wake no answering chord born of the experiences that make up what we know of human life.

When the beauty of realism shall be truly known, we shall read the book, or look upon the work of art, and in the light of all we know of life, shall ask our beings whether the picture that the author or the painter creates for us is like the image that is born of the consciousness that moves our soul, and the experiences that have made us know.

Realism worships at the shrine of nature; it does not say that there may not be a sphere in which beings higher than man can live, or that some time an eye may not rest upon a fairer sunset than was ever born behind the clouds and sea, but it knows that through countless ages nature has slowly fitted the brain and eye of man to the earth on which we live and the objects that we see: and the perfect earthly eye must harmonize with the perfect earthly scene.

To say that realism is coarse and vulgar is to declare against nature and her works, and to assert that the man she made may dream

of things higher and grander than nature could unfold. The eye of the great sculptor reveals to him the lines that make the most perfect human form, and he chisels out the marble block until it resembles this image so completely that it almost seems to live. Nature, through ages of experiment and development, has made this almost faultless form. It is perfect because every part is best fitted for the separate work it has to do. The artist knows that he could not improve a single organ if he would, for all the rest of nature must be adjusted to the change. He has the skill to reproduce this shape in lasting stone, and the human brain could not conceive a form more beautiful and fair. Here is a perfect image of the highest work that countless centuries of nature's toil has made, and yet some would seek to beautify and sanctify this work by dressing it in the garb that shifting fashion and changing fancy makes for man.

Only the vulgar superstition of the past ever suggested that the reproduction of human forms in stone was an unholy work. Through long dark centuries religion taught that the flesh was vile and bad, and that the soul of man was imprisoned in a charnel house, unfit for human sight. The early Christians wounded, bruised, and maimed their house of clay; they covered it with skins, which under no circumstances could be removed, and many ancient saints lived and died without ever having looked upon the bodies nature gave. The images of saints and martyrs, which in the name of religion were scattered through Eu-

rope, were covered with paint and clothes, and were nearly as hideous as the monks that placed them there. When the condition of Europe and its religious thought are clearly understood, it is not difficult to imagine the reception that greeted the first dawn of modern realistic art. Sculpture and painting defied the material. They told of beauty in the human form which hundreds of years of religious fanaticism had taught was bad and vile. If the flesh was beautiful, what of the monks and priests, who had hidden it from sight, who had kept it covered night and day through all their foolish lives, who maimed and bruised, cut and lacerated, for the glory of the spirit, which they thought was chained within. The church had taught that the death of the flesh was the birth of the soul, and they therefore believed that the artist's resurrection of the flesh was the death of the soul.

This old religious prejudice, born of a misty, superstitious past, has slowly faded from the minds of men, but we find its traces even yet. The origin of the feeling against realistic art has well nigh been forgot, but much of the feeling still remains. No one would now pretend to say that all the body was unholy or unfit for sight, and yet years of custom and inherited belief have made us think that a part is good and the rest is bad: that nature, in her work of building up the human form, has made one part sacred and another vile. It is easy to mistake custom for nature, and inherited prejudice for morality. There is scarcely a single portion of the human body but that some peo-

ple have thought it holy, and scarcely a single portion but that some have believed it vile. It was not shame that made clothing, but clothing that made shame. If we would eradicate from our beliefs all that inheritance and environment have given, it would be hard for us to guess how much should still remain. Custom has made most things good and most things bad, according to the whim of time and place. To find solid ground we must turn to nature and ask her what it is that conduces to the highest happiness and the longest life.

The realistic artist cannot accept the popular belief, whatever that may be, as to just where the dead line on the human body should be drawn that separates the sacred and profane. There are realists that look at all the beauty and loveliness of the world, and all its maladjustments too, and do not seek to answer the old, old question whether back of this is any all-controlling and designing power; they do not answer, for they cannot know; but they strive to touch the subtle chord that makes their individual lives vibrate in harmony with the great heart of that nature, which they love; and they cannot think but that all parts of life are good, and that while men may differ, nature must know best.

Other realists there are that believe they see in nature the work of a divine maker, who created man in his own image as the last and highest triumph of his skill; that the minutest portion of the universe exists because he wished it thus. To the realist that accepts this all-controlling power, any imputation against a

portion of his master's work must reach back to the author that designed it all.

We need not say that the human body might not be better than it is; we need only know that it is the best that man can have, and that its wondrous mechanism has been constructed with infinitely more than human skill; that every portion is adapted for its work, and through the harmony of every part the highest good is reached; and that all is beautiful, for it makes the being best adapted to the earth. Those who denounce realistic art deny that knowledge is power and that wisdom only can make harmony, and they insist instead that there are some things vital to life and happiness that we should not know, but that if we must know these things, we should at all events pretend that we do not. One day the world will learn that all things are good or bad according to the service they perform. One day it ought to learn that the power to create immortality, through infinite succeeding links of human life, is the finest and most terrible that nature ever gave to man, and that to ignore this power or call it bad, or fail to realize the great responsibility of this tremendous fact, is to cry out against the power that gave us life, and commit the greatest human sin, for it may be one that never dies.

The true artist does not find all beauty in the human face or form. He looks upon the sunset, painting all the clouds with rosy hue, and his highest wish is to create another scene like this. He never dreams that he could paint a sunset fairer than the one which lights

the fading world. A fairer sunset would be something else. He sees beauty in the quiet lake, the grassy field, and running brook; he sees majesty in the cataract and mountain peak. He knows that he can paint no streams and mountain peaks more perfect than the ones that nature made.

The growth of letters has been like the growth of art from the marvelous and mythical to the natural and true. The tales and legends of the ancient past were not of common men and common scenes. These could not impress the undeveloped intellect of long ago. A man of letters could not deify a serf, or tell the simple story of the poor. He must write to maintain the status of the world, and please the prince that gave him food; so he told of kings and queens, of knights and ladies, of strife and conquest; and the coloring he used was human blood.

The world has grown accustomed to those ancient tales, to scenes of blood and war, and novels that would thrill the soul and cause the hair to stand on end. It has read these tales so long that the true seems commonplace, and unfit to fill the pages of a book. But all the time we forget the fact that the story could not charm unless we half believed it true. The men and women in the tale we learn to love and hate; we take an interest in their lives; we hope they may succeed or fail; we must not be told at every page that the people of the book are men of straw, that no such beings ever lived upon the earth. We could take no interest in men and women that are myths

conjured up to play their parts, and remind us in every word they speak that, regardless of the 'happiness or anguish the author makes them feel, they are but myths and can know neither joy nor pain.

It may be that the realistic tale is commonplace, but so is life, and the realistic tale is true. Among the countless millions of the earth it is only here and there, and now and then, that some soul is born from out the mighty deep that does not soon return to the great sea and leave no ripple on the waves.

In the play of life each actor seems important to himself; the world he knows revolves around him as the central figure of the scene; his friends rejoice in all the fortune he attains and weep with him in all his grief. To him the world is bounded by the faces that he knows, and the scenes in which he lives. He forgets the great surging world outside, and cannot think how small a space he fills in that infinity which bounds his life. He dies, and a few sorrowing friends mourn him for a day and the world does not know he ever lived or ever died. In the ordinary life nearly all events are commonplace; but a few important days are thinly sprinkled in amongst all of those that intervene between the cradle and the grave. We eat and drink, we work and sleep, and here and there a great joy or sorrow creeps in upon our lives, and leaves a day that stands out against the monotony of all the rest; like the pyramids upon the level plains; but these events are very few and are important only to ourselves, and for the rest we walk

with steady pace and slow along the short and narrow path of life, and rely upon the common things alone to occupy our minds and hide from view the marble stone that here and there gleams through the over-hanging trees just where the road leaves off.

The old novel which we used to read and to which the world so fondly clings, had no idea of relation or perspective. It had a hero and a heroine, and sometimes more than one. The revolutions of the planets were less important than their love. War, shipwreck, and conflagration, all conspired to produce the climax of the scene, and the whole world stood still until the lovers' hearts and hands were joined. Wide oceans, burning deserts, arctic seas, impassable jungles, irate fathers, and even designing mothers, were helpless against the decree that fate had made, and when all the barriers were passed and love had triumphed over impossibilities, the tale was done; through the rest of life nothing of interest could occur. Sometimes in the progress of the story, if the complications were too great, a thunderbolt or an earthquake was introduced to destroy the villain and help on the match. Earthquakes sometimes happen, and the realistic novelist might write a tale of a scene like this, but then the love affair would be an incident of the earthquake, and not the earthquake an incident of the love affair.

In real life the affections have played an important part and sometimes great things have been done and suffered in the name of love, but most of the affairs of the human

heart, have been as natural as the other events of life.

The true love story is generally a simple thing. "Beside a country road, on a sloping hill, lives a farmer, in the house his father owned before. He has a daughter, who skims the milk, and makes the beds, and goes to singing school at night. There are other members of the household, but our tale is no concern of theirs. In the meadow back of the house a woodchuck has dug its hole, and reared a family in its humble home. Across the valley only a mile away, another farmer lives. He has a son, who plows the fields and does the chores and goes to singing school at night. He cannot sing, but attends the school as regularly as if he could. Of course he does not let the girl go home alone, and in the spring, when singing school is out, he visits her on Sunday eve without excuse. If the girl had not lived so near, the boy would have fancied another girl about the same age, who also went to singing school. Back of the second farmer's house is another woodchuck hole and woodchuck home. After a year or two of courtship the boy and girl are married as their parents were before, and they choose a pretty spot beside the road, and build another house near by, and settle down to common life: and so the world moves on. And a woodchuck on one farm meets a woodchuck on the other, and they choose a quiet place beside a stump, in no one's way, where they think they have a right to be, and dig another hole and make another home." For after all, men and animals are much alike and

nature loves them both and loves them all, and sends them forth to drive the loneliness from off the earth, and then takes them back into her loving breast to sleep.

It may be that there are few great incidents in the realistic tale, but each event appeals to life and cannot fail to wake our memories and make us live the past again. The great authors of the natural school—Tolstoi, Hardy, Howells, Daudet, Ibsen, Flaubert, Zola and their kind, have made us think and live. Their words have burnished up our minds and revealed a thousand pictures that hang upon the walls of memory, covered with dust of years, and hidden from our sight. Sometimes of course we cry with pain at the picture that is thrown before our view, but life consists of emotions, and we cannot truly live unless the depths are stirred. These great masters, it is true, may sometimes shock the over-sensitive with the tales they tell of life, but if the tale is true, why hide it from our sight?

There is nothing more common than the protest against the wicked stories of the realistic school, filled with tales of passion and of sin; but he that denies passion denies all the life that exists upon the earth, and cries out against the mother that gave him birth. And he that ignores this truth passes with contempt the greatest fact that nature has impressed upon the world. Those who condemn as sensual the tales of Tolstoi and Daudet still defend the love stories of which our literature is full. Those weak and silly tales that make women fit only to be the playthings of the world, and

deny to them a single thought or right except to serve their master, man. These objectors do not contend that tales dealing with the feelings and affections shall not be told, they approve these tales; they simply insist that they shall be false instead of true. The old novel filled the mind of the school girl with a thousand thoughts that had no place in life—with ten thousand pictures she could never see. It taught that some time she should meet a prince in disguise to whom she would freely give her hand and heart. So she went out upon the road to find this prince, and the more disguised he was, the more certain did she feel that he was the prince for whom she sought. The realist paints the passions and affections as they are. Both man and woman can see their beauty and their terror, their true position, and the relation that they bear to all the rest of life. He would not beguile the girl into the belief that her identity should be destroyed and merged for the sake of this feeling, which not once in ten thousand times could realize the promises the novel made; but he would leave her as an individual to make the most she can, and all she can, of life, with all the hope and chance of conquest, which men have taken for themselves. Neither would the realist cry out blindly against these deep passions, which have moved men and women in the past, and which must continue fierce and strong as long as life exists. He is taught by the scientist that the fiercest heat may be transformed to light, and is taught by life that from the strongest passions are sometimes born the sweetest and the purest souls.

In these days of creeds and theories, of preachers in the pulpit and of preachers out, we are told that all novels should have a moral and be written to serve some end. So we have novels on religion, war, marriage, divorce, socialism, theosophy, woman's rights, and other topics without end. It is not enough that the preachers and lecturers shall tell us how to think and act; the novelist must try his hand at preaching too. He starts out with a theory, and every scene and incident must be bent to make it plain that the author believes certain things. The doings of the men and women in the book are secondary to the views the author holds. The theories may be true, but the poor characters that must adjust their lives to these ideal states are sadly warped and twisted out of shape. The realist would teach a lesson, too, but he would not violate a single fact for all the theories in the world—for a theory could not be true if it did violence to life. He paints his picture so true and perfect that all men who look upon it know it is a likeness of the world that they have seen; they know that these are men and women and little children that they meet upon the streets; they see the conditions of their lives, and the moral of the picture sinks deep into their minds.

There are so-called scientists that make a theory and then gather facts to prove their theory true; the real scientist patiently and impartially gathers facts, and then forms a theory to explain and harmonize these facts. All life bears a moral, and the true artist must teach a lesson with his every fact. Some con-

tend that the moral teacher must not tell the truth; the realist holds that there can be no moral teaching like the truth. The world has grown tired of preachers and sermons; today it asks for facts. It has grown tired of fairies and angels, and asks for flesh and blood. It looks on life as it exists, both its beauty and its horror, its joy and its sorrow; it wishes to see it all; not the prince and the millionaire alone, but the laborer and the beggar, the master and the slave. We see the beautiful and the ugly, and with it know what the world is and what it ought to be; and the true picture, which the author saw and painted, stirs the heart to holier feelings and to grander thoughts.

It is from the realities of life that the highest idealities are born. The philosopher may reason with unerring logic, and show us where the world is wrong. The economist may tell us of the progress and poverty that go hand in hand; but these are theories, and the abstract cannot suffer pain. Dickens went out into the streets of the great city and found poor little Jo sweeping the crossing with his broom. All around was the luxury and the elegance, which the rich have ever appropriated to themselves; great mansions, fine carriages, beautiful dresses; but in all the great city of houses and homes poor little Jo could find no place to lay his head. His home was in the street, and every time he halted for a moment in the throng, the policeman touched him with his club and bade him "move on." At last, ragged, wretched, almost dead with "moving on," he sank down upon the cold stone steps of a magnificent build

ing erected for "The Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts." As we think of wretched, ragged Jo in the midst of all this luxury and wealth, we see the tens of thousands of other waifs in the great cities of the world, and we condemn the so-called civilization of the earth that builds the mansions of the rich and great upon the rags and miseries of the poor.

The true realist cannot worship at the shrine of power, nor prostitute his gifts for gold. With an artist's eye he sees the world exactly as it is, and tells the story faithful unto life. He feels for every heart that beats, else he could not paint them as he does. It takes the soul to warm a statue into life and make living flesh and coursing blood, and each true picture that he paints or draws makes the world a better place in which to live.

The artists of the realistic school have a sense so fine that they cannot help catching the inspiration that is filling all the world's best minds with the hope of greater injustice and more equal social life. With the vision of the seer they feel the coming dawn when true equality shall reign upon the earth; the time when democracy shall no more be confined to constitutions and to laws, but will be a part of human life. The greatest artists of the world today are telling facts and painting scenes that cause humanity to stop, and think, and ask why one should be a master and another be a serf; why a portion of the world should toil and spin, should wear away its strength and life, that the rest should live in idleness and ease.

The old-time artists thought they served humanity by painting saints and madonnas and angels from the myths they conjured in their brains. They painted war with long lines of soldiers dressed in uniforms, and looking plump and gay; and a battle scene was always drawn from the side of the victorious camp, with the ensign proudly planting his bright colors on the rampart of the foe. One or two were dying, but always in their comrades' arms, and listening to shouts of victory that filled the air, and thinking of the righteous cause for which they fought and died. In the last moments they dreamed of pleasant burial yards at home, and of graves kept green by loving, grateful friends; and a smile of joy shone on their wasted faces that was so sweet, that it seemed a hardship not to die in war. They painted peace as a white-winged dove settling down upon a cold and fading earth. Between the two it was plain which choice a boy would make, and thus art served the state and king.

But Verestchagin painted war; he painted war so true to life that as we look upon the scene, we long for peace. He painted war as war has ever been, and as war will ever be—a horrible and ghastly scene, where men, drunk with blind frenzy which rulers say is patriotic pride, and made mad by drums and fifes and smoke and shot and shell and flowing blood, seek to maim and wound and kill, because a ruler gives the word. He paints a battlefield, a field of life and death; a field of carnage and of blood; and who are these that fight like fiends and devils driven to despair? What

cause is this that makes these men forget that they are men, and vie with beasts to show their cruel thirst for blood? They shout of home and native land, but they have no homes, and the owners of their native land exist upon their toil and blood. The nobles and princes, for whom this fight is waged, are far away upon a hill, beyond the reach of shot and shell, and from this spot they watch their slaves pour out their blood to satisfy their rulers' pride and lust of power. What is the enemy they fight? Men like themselves; who blindly go to death at another king's command, slaves, who have no land, who freely give their toil or blood, whichever one their rulers may demand. These fighting soldiers have no cause for strife, but their rulers live by kindling in their hearts a love of native land, a love that makes them hate their brother laborers of other lands, and dumbly march to death to satisfy a king's caprice. But let us look once more after the battle has been fought. Here we see the wreck and ruin of the strife; the field is silent now, given to the dead, the beast of prey and night. A young soldier lies upon the ground; the snow is falling fast around his form; the lonely mountain peaks rise up on every side; the wreck of war is all about. His uniform is soiled and stained, a spot of red is seen upon his breast. It is not the color that his country wove upon his coat to catch his eye and bait him to his death; it is hard and jagged and cold. It is his life's blood, which leaked out through a hole that followed the point of a saber to his heart. His form is stiff and cold, for he is

dead. The cruel wound and icy air have done their work. The government that took his life taught this poor boy to love his native land; as a child he dreamed of scenes of glory and of power, and the great wide world just waiting to fall captive to his magic strength. He dreamed of war and strife, of victory and fame; if he should die, kind hands would smooth his brow, and loving friends would keep his grave and memory green, because he died in war. But no human eye is there at last, as the mist of night and mist of death shut out the lonely mountains from his sight. The snow is all around, and the air above is gray with falling flakes, which soon will hide him from the world; and when the summer time shall come again, no one can tell his bleaching bones from all the rest. The only life upon the scene is the buzzard slowly circling in the air above his head, waiting to make sure that death has come. The bird looks down upon the boy, into the eyes through which he first looked out upon the great, wide world, and which his mother fondly kissed; upon these eyes the buzzard will commence his meal.

Not all the world is beautiful, and not all of life is good. The true artist has no right to choose the lovely spots alone and make us think that this is life. He must bring the world before our eyes and make us read and learn. As he loves the true and noble, he must show the false and bad. As he yearns for true equality, he must paint the master and the slave. He must tell the truth, and tell it all, must tell it o'er and o'er again, till the deafest ear

will listen and the dullest mind will think. He must not swerve to please the world by painting only pleasant sights and telling only lovely tales. He must think, and paint, and write, and work, until the world shall learn so much and grow so good, that the true will all be beautiful and all the real be ideal.

ROBERT BURNS

It is difficult to account for a genius like Robert Burns. His life and work seem to defy the laws of heredity and environment alike. The beasts of the field were scarcely bound closer to the soil than were the ancestors from which he sprang; and from his early infancy he was forced to follow the stony path his father trod before. As a mere child, he learned how hard it is to sustain life in the face of an unfriendly nature and a cruel, bitter world. He was early bred to toil; not the work that gives strength and health, but the hard, constant, manual labor that degrades and embitters, deforms and twists and stunts the body and the soul alike. Burns was denied even the brief years of childhood—those few short years upon which most of us look back from our disappointments and cares as the one bright spot in a gray and level plain.

It is not alone by the works he has left us that Robert Burns is to be truly judged. Fortune endowed him with a wondrous brain and a still rarer and greater gift—a tender, loving, universal heart; but as if she grudged him these and sought to destroy or stunt their power, she cast his lot in a social and religious environment as hard and forbidding as the cold and sterile soil of his native land; and from these surroundings alone he was obliged to draw the warmth and color and sunshine that should have come from loving hearts, generous

bounties, and bright, blue southern skies. In measuring the power and character of Robert Burns, we must remember the hard and cruel conditions of his life, and judge of his great achievements in the light of these.

The ways of destiny have ever been beyond the ken of man; now and then, at rare, long intervals, she descends upon the earth, and in her arms she bears disguised a precious gift, which she lavished upon a blind, unwilling world. She passes by the gorgeous palaces and beautiful abodes of men, and drops the treasure in a manger or a hut; she comes again to take it back from a world that knew it not and cast it out; and again, she seeks it not among the strong and great, but in the hovel of the poor, the prison pen, or perhaps upon the scaffold or the block.

Measured by the standards of our day and generation, the life of Robert Burns was a failure and mistake. He went back to the great common Mother as naked of all the gilded trappings and baubles, which men call wealth, as when she first placed the struggling infant on its mother's breast.

Robert Burns was not a "business man"; he was not one of Dumfries' "first citizens"—in the measure of that day and this; he was one of its last if not its worst. He had no stock in a corporation and no interest in a syndicate or trust. He had neither a bank nor bank account. He never endowed a library, a museum, or a university. He was a singer of songs,—a dreamer of dreams. He was poor, improvident, intemperate, and according to the

Scottish creed, immoral and irreligious. In spite of his great intellect he was doubted, neglected and despised. He died in destitution and despair; but the great light of his genius, which his neighbors could not see or comprehend, has grown brighter and clearer as the years have rolled away. A beautiful mausoleum now holds his once neglected ashes; monuments have been reared to his memory wherever worth is known and fame preserved; while millions of men and women, the greatest and the humblest of the world alike, have felt their own heartstrings moved and stirred in unison with the music of this immortal bard, whose song was the breath of Nature,—the sweetest, tenderest melody that ever came from that rarest instrument—the devoted poet's soul.

The great masterpieces of his genius were not created in the pleasant study of a home of refinement, luxury, and ease, but were born in the fields, the farm yard, the stable; while the "monarch peasant" was bending above the humblest tasks that men pursue for bread. Only the most ordinary education was within the reach of this child of toil, and the world's great storehouses of learning, literature, and art were sealed forever from his sight; and yet, with only the rude peasants, with whom his life was spent, the narrow setting of bleak fields and gray hills, which was the small stage on which he moved, and the sterile Scotch dialect with which to paint, he stirred the hearts of men with the sweetest, highest, purest melody that has ever moved the human soul.

Olive Schreiner tells of an artist whose pic-

tures shone with the richest, brightest glow. His admirers gazed upon the canvas and wondered where he found the colors—so much rarer than any they had ever seen before. Other artists searched the earth but could find no tints like his; he died with the secret in his breast. And when they undressed him to put his grave-clothes on, they found an old wound, hard and jagged above his heart; and still they wondered where he found the coloring for his work. Robert Burns, perhaps more than any other man who ever lived, taught the great truth that poets are not made but born; that the richest literature, the brightest gems of art, even the most pleasing earthly prospects are less than one spark of the divine fire, which alone can kindle the true light. Robert Burns like all great artists, taught the world that the beauty of the landscape, and the grandeur and pathos of life depend, not upon the external objects that nature has chanced to place before our view, but upon the soul of the artist, which alone can really see and interpret the manifold works of the great author, beside which all human effort is so poor and weak.

Millet looked at the French peasants standing in their wooden shoes, digging potatoes from the earth and pausing to bow reverently at the sounding of the Angelus, and saw in this simple life, so close to Nature's heart, more beauty and pathos and poetry than all the glittering courts of Europe could produce. And Robert Burns, whose broad mind and sympathetic soul made him kin to all living things, had no need to see the splendor and gaiety of wealth and

power, to visit foreign shores and unknown lands; but the flowers, the heather, the daisies, the bleak fields, the pelting rains, the singing birds, the lowing cattle, and above all, the simple country folk seen through his eyes, and felt by his soul, and held in his all-embracing heart, were covered with a beauty and a glory that all the artificial world could not create, and that his genius has endowed with immortal life. Robert Burns did not borrow his philosophy from the books, his humanity from the church, or his poetry from the schools. Luckily for us he escaped all these, and unfettered and untaught, went straight to the soul of Nature to learn from the great source, the harmony and beauty and unity that pervades the whole; and he painted these with colors drawn from his great human heart. His universal sympathy gave him an insight into life that students of science and philosophy can never reach. Contemplating Nature, and seeing her generous bounties lavished alike on all her children, he could not but contrast this with the selfishness and inhumanity of man, which crushes out the weak and helpless and builds up the great and strong. Burns was a natural leveler, and while men still believed in the "divine right of kings," he preached that "man was the divine King of rights." None knew better than he the injustice of the social life in which he lived, and in which we live today. Burns knew, as all men of intelligence understand, that worldly goods are not, and never have been given as a reward of either brains or merit.

It's hardly in a body's power
 To keep at times, frae being sour,
 To see how things are shared;
 How best o' chiefs are whiles in want
 While coofs on countless thousands rant
 And ken na how to wair't.

The immortal singer of songs, and all his descendants, received infinitely less for all the works of his genius than an ordinary gambler often gets for one sale of something that he never owned, or one purchase of something that he never bought; and it is doubtful if all the masterpieces of the world in art, in literature, and in science, ever brought as much cash to those whose great, patient brains have carefully and honestly wrought that the earth might be richer and better and brighter, as has been often "made" by one inferior speculator upon a single issue of watered stock.

Living in the midst of aristocracy and privilege and caste, Burns was a democrat that believed in the equality of man. It required no books or professors, or theories to teach him the injustice of the social conditions under which the world has ever lived. Here, as elsewhere, he looked to the heart—a teacher infinitely more honest and reliable than the brain.

If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave,
 By Nature's law design'd;
 Why was an independent wish
 E'er planted in my mind?

If not, why am I subject to
 His cruelty, or scorn?
 Or why has man the will and pow'r
 To make his fellow mourn?

Preachers and authors and teachers, judges and professors and lawyers, have been employed for ages to teach the justice of slavery and the folly and crime of equal rights; but through all quibbles and evasions, this question of Burns, straight from the heart, as well as the head, shows that all these excuses are but snares and cheats. The voice of the French Revolution could not fail to move a soul like that of Robert Burns. This great struggle for human liberty came upon the world with almost the suddenness of an earthquake, and with much of its terrors, too. Here the poor and the oppressed felt the first substantial hope for freedom that had pierced the long, dark centuries since history told the acts of men. To the oppressors and the powerful, who hated liberty then as they ever have, before and since, it was a wild, dread threat of destruction and ruin to their precious "rights." When the struggle commenced, Burns was enjoying the munificent salary of fifty pounds a year as a whisky gauger in the village of Dumfries. He had already spent a winter in Edinburgh, and had been feted and dined by the aristocracy and culture of Scotland's capital without losing his head, although at no small risk. An acquaintance and entertainer of the nobility and an incumbent of a lucrative office, there was but one thing for Burns to do; this was to condemn the Revolution and lend his trenchant pen to the oppressor's cause; but this course he flatly refused to take. He openly espoused the side of the people, and wrote the "Trèe of

Liberty," one of his most stirring songs, in its defense.

Upon this tree there grows sic fruit,
Its virtues a'can tell man;
It raises man aboon the brute,

It mak's him ken himsel' man.
Gif ance the peasant taste a bit,
He's greater than a lord man.

King Louis thought to cut it down
When it was unco sma' man;
For this the watchman cracked his crown,
Cut aff his head an' a' man.

Even these words are not strong enough to express his love for natural liberty and his distrust of those forms and institutions which over and over again have crushed the priceless gem they pretend to protect.

A fig for those by law protected!
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

Even higher and broader was Burns' view of equality and right. He stood on a serene height, where he looked upon all the strife and contention of individuals and states, and dreamed of a perfect harmony and universal order, where men and Nations alike should be at peace, and the world united in one grand common brotherhood, where the fondest wish of each should be the highest good of all. These beautiful, prophetic lines seem to speak of a day as distant now as when Burns wrote them down a hundred years ago. But still, all men

that love the human race will ever hope, and
work, and say with him:

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth
May bear the gree, and a' that;
For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that.

It is perhaps as a singer of songs that the literary fame of Burns will longest be preserved. No other poet has ever breathed such music from his soul. His melodies are as sweet and pure as the bubbling spring; and as natural and spontaneous as ever came from the throat of the nightingale or lark. These songs could not be made. The feeling and passion that left his soul bore this music as naturally as the zephyr that has fanned the strings of the Aeolian harp. The meter of these songs was not learned by scanning Latin verse, or studying the dry rules that govern literary art, but it was born of the regular pulse beats, which in the heart of Nature's poets are as smooth and unstudied as the rippling laughter of her purling brooks.

John Anderson, my jo, John,
When we were first acquent,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonnie brow was brent;
But now your brow is beld, John,
Your locks are like the snow;
But blessing on your frosty pow,
John Anderson, my jo.

John Anderson, my jo, John,
We climb the hill tegither,

And mony a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither;
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep tegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo.

Although a plow boy and surrounded by the grime and dirt that comes from contact with the soil, still even here Burns found material for music and poetry that will live as long as human hearts endure; for, though the sky may be warmer and bluer on the Mediterranean shore than where it domes the Scottish hills and crags, still the same heaven bends above them both, and the same infinite mysteries are hidden in their unfathomed depths. The tragedy of death is alike, whether defying the power of a Prince, or entering the home of the humblest peasant to bring the first moments of relief and rest. The miracle of life, whether wrought by Nature on the rich couch of the Queen or the unwatched pallet of the peasant, is the same mystery, ever new, ever old, appealing ever to the heart of man. The affections and passions,—those profound feelings that Nature planted deep in the being of all sentient things, and on whose strength all life depends,—these are the deepest and purest as we leave the conventions and trappings of the artificial world, and draw nearer to the heart of the great Universal power. With the sky above, the fields around, and all Nature throbbing and teeming with pulsing life, but one thing more was needed to make harmony and music, and that was Robert Burns.

The old story of human love was sung by

him a thousand times and in a thousand varying moods, as never love was sung before. It mattered not that his melodies breathed of rustic scenes, of country maids, and of plain untutored hearts that beat as Nature made them feel, unfettered by the restraints and cords of an artificial life. Transport his Mary to a gorgeous palace, and deck her fair form with the richest treasures of the earth and bring to her side the proudest noble that ever paid homage to a princess, and no singer,—not even Burns himself,—could make a melody like the matchless music that he sung to Highland Mary.

How sweetly bloom'd the gay green birk,
How rich the hawthorn's blossom;
As underneath their fragrant shade,
I clasp'd her to my bosom!

The golden hours, on angel wings,
Flew o'er me and my dearie;
For dear to me as light and life
Was my sweet Highland Mary.

All the conventions and baubles and spangles which fashion and custom use to adorn the fair could only have cheapened and made vulgar the rustic maiden that moved Burns' soul to song.

These sweet lines could never have been written of any but a simple country lass, whose natural charms had moved a susceptible human heart:

I see her in the dewy flowers,
I see her sweet and fair;
I hear her in the tunefu' birds,
I hear her charm the air;

There's not a bonnie flower that springs
By fountain, shaw, or green,
There's not a bonnie bird that sings,
But minds me o' my Jean.

Who was this Burns that sang these sweet songs and whose musical soul was stirred by every breeze and moved to poetry by every lovely face and form that came within his view? Biographers and critics and admirers have praised the genius and begged excuses for the man. Without asking charity for this illustrious singer, let us view him in the light of justice, exactly as he was. It is not difficult to understand the character of Robert Burns. His heart was generous and warm and kind; his mind was open as the day, and his soul was sensitive to every breath that stirred the air. These qualities have made the poet loved in every land on earth, and brought more pilgrims to his grave than were ever drawn to the tomb of any other poet or author that has ever lived and died. And yet the short-sighted, carping, moralizing world, with solemn voice and wisdom ill-assumed, has ever told how much better and holier he could have been and should have been. Poor, silly, idle world, can you never learn that the qualities that make us strong must also make us weak; that the heart that melts at suffering and pain is made of clay so sensitive and fine as to be moved and swayed by all the emotions of the soul? Would you serve the weak, the suffering and the poor—would you calm their fears and dry their eyes and feel with them the cruel woes of life—you must wear your heart upon

your sleeve, and then of course the daws will peck it into bits. Would you keep it safely hidden from the daws, you must hide it in a breast of stone or ice and keep it only for yourself. Perhaps we may admire the man that walks with steady step along a straight and narrow path, unmoved by all the world outside. He never feels and never errs. But we cannot ask of either man the virtues that belong to both, and when our choice is made we must take the strength and weakness too.

We look at the mountain top, lifting its snow-crowned head high into the everlasting blue, and are moved with wonder and with awe. Above is the endless sky; below, the world with all its bickering and strife, the clouds, the lightning and the storm, but the mountain, cold, impassive, changeless, unmoved by all the world, looks ever upward to the eternal heavens above. Again we gaze on the peaceful, fertile lowlands, rich with their generous harvests yet unborn—beautiful with their winding streams and grassy fields, ever ready to bestow bounteously on all that ask, demanding little and lavishly returning all; and we love the quiet, rustic, generous beauty of the scene. The mountain is majestic and sublime, and the yielding, generous lowlands are beautiful and pleasing too. We love them both, but we cannot have them both at once and both in one.

Robert Burns, and all men like him that ever lived, were always giving from their generous souls. In the cold judgment of the world, Burns wasted many a gem upon the thought-

less, worthless crowd, who consumed a life he should have spent for nobler things. But the flower that never wastes its fragrance has no perfume to give out. If it is truly sweet, its strength is borne away on every idle wind that blows. Robert Burns with lavish bounty shed his life and fragrance on every soul he met. He loved them all and loved them well: his sensitive, harmonious soul vibrated to every touch, and moved in perfect harmony with every heart that came within his reach. The lives of men like him are one long harmony; but as they pass along the stage of life, they leave a trail of disappointed hopes, and broken hearts, and vain regrets. But of all the tragedies great and small that mark their path, the greatest far and most pathetic is the sad and hopeless wreck that ever surely falls upon the exhausted artist's life.

The life of Burns was filled with wrecks—with promises made and broken, with hopes aroused, and then dashed to earth again. It was filled with these because one man cannot give himself personally to all the world. The vices of Robert Burns perhaps like those of all the rest that ever lived, were virtues carried to excess. Of course, the world could not understand it then, and cannot understand it now, and perhaps it never will, for slander and malice and envy, like death, always love a shining mark. The life of Burns and the life of each is the old Greek fable told again. Achilles' mother would make him invulnerable by dipping him in the river Styx. She held him by the heel, which remained unwashed

and vulnerable, and finally brought him to his death. To whatever dizzy height we climb, and however invulnerable we seek to be, there still remains with all the untouched heel that binds us to the earth. And after all, this weak and human spot, is the truest bond of kinship that unites the world.

I look back at Robert Burns, at the poor human life that went out a hundred years ago, and study its works to know the man. I care not what his neighbors thought; I care not for the idle gossip of an idle hour. I know that his immortal songs were not born of his wondrous brain alone, but of the gentlest, truest, tenderest heart that ever felt another's pain. I know full well that the love songs of Robert Burns could have come from no one else than Robert Burns. I know that even the Infinite could not have changed the man and left the songs. Burns, like all true poets, told us what he felt and saw, and it is not for me to ask excuses for this or that; but rather reverently to bow my head in the presence of this great memory, and thank the infinite source of life for blessing us with Robert Burns exactly as he was.

It is difficult to understand our own being; it is impossible to know our fellow man's, but I have faith to think that all life is but a portion of one great inclusive power, and that all is good and none is bad. The true standard for judging Burns and all other men is given by Carlyle, and I cannot refrain from borrowing and adopting what he says:

"The world is habitually unjust in its judg-

ments of such men; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance: It decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes; and not positively but negatively, less on what is done right than on what is or is not done wrong. Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the ratio of these to the whole diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system; or it may be a city hippodrome; nay, the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured; and it is assumed that the diameter of the ginhorse and that of the planet will yield the same ratio when compared with them! Here lies the root of many a blind, cruel condemnation of Burns, Swift, Rousseau, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into harbor with shrouds and tackle damaged; the pilot is blameworthy; he has not been all-wise and all-powerful; but to know how blameworthy; tell us first whether his voyage has been around the Globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs."

Robert Burns has been dust for a hundred years, and yet the world knows him better now than the neighbors that lived beside his door. I look back upon the little village of Dumfries,—not the first or the last town that entertained angels unawares. I see poor Robert Burns passing down the street, and the pharisees and self-righteous walking on the other side. The bill of indictment brought

against him by the Dumfries community was long and black; he was intemperate, immoral, irreligious, and disloyal to the things that were. The first two would doubtless have been forgiven, but the others could not be condoned. And so this illustrious man walked an outcast through the town that to-day makes its proudest boast that it holds the ashes of the mighty dead, who in life was surrounded by such a halo of glory that his neighbors could not see his face.

A hundred years ago Scotland was held tightly in the grasp of the Presbyterian faith. Calvinism is not very attractive even now, especially to us that live and expect to die outside its fold, but even Calvinism has softened and changed in a hundred years. Burns was too religious to believe in the Presbyterian faith, and to the Scotch Covenanter there was no religion outside the Calvinistic creed. How any man can read the poetry of Robert Burns and not feel the deep religious spirit that animates its lines is more than I can see. True, he ridicules the dogmas and the creeds that held the humanity and intellect of Scotland in their paralyzing grasp; but creeds and dogmas are the work of man; they come and go; are born and die; serve their time and pass away; but the love of humanity, the instincts of charity and tenderness, the deep reverence felt in the presence of the infinite mystery and power that pervade the universe, these, the basis of all the religions of the earth, remain forever, while creeds and dogmas crumble to the dust.

Scotland of a hundred years ago measured Burns' religion by "Holy Willie's Prayer," "The Holy Fair," and kindred songs. The world a hundred years from now will not make these the only test. Dumfries and all the Unco' Guid of Scotland could not forgive Burns for writing:

O Thou wha in the heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,
A' for thy glory,
And no for ony guid or ill
They've done afore thee!

I bless and praise thy matchless might,
When thousands thou hast left in night,
That I am here afore thy sight,
For gifts an' grace,
A burnin, and a shinin' light,
To a' this place.

Lord, hear my earnest cry an' pray'r,
Against that presbt'ry o' Ayr;
Thy strong right hand, Lord make it bare
Upo' their heads!
Lord, weigh it down, an' dinna spare,
For their misdeeds.

But, Lord, remember me and mine
Wi' mercies temp'ral and divine,
That I for gear and grace may shine,
Excell'd by name;
And a' the glory shall be thine,
Amen, Amen.

It was not enough that Robert Burns taught a religion as pure and gentle and loving as that proclaimed by the Nazarene himself. Its meaning and beauty and charity were lost on those who would not see. Long ago it was written down that, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren,

ye have done it unto me." If this is any test of a religious life, then few men will stand as high in the great beyond as Robert Burns. This poor poet has melted more hearts to pity and moved more souls to mercy, and inclined more lives to charity than any other poet that ever dreamed and sung. Not men and women and children alone were the objects of his bounteous love and tender heart, but he felt the pain of the bird, the hare, the mouse, and even the daisy whose roots were upturned to the biting blast. Hear him sing of the poor bird for whom he shudders at the winter's cold:

Ilka hopping bird, wee helpless thing
 That in the merry month o' spring
 Delighted me to hear thee sing,
 What comes o' thee!
 Where wilt thou cow'r thy chilling wing
 And close thy ee?

Few men that ever lived would stop and lament with Burns, as he shattered the poor clay home of the field mouse with his plow. No matter what he did; no matter what he said; no matter what his creed; the man that wrote these lines deserves a place with the best and purest of this world or any other that the Universe may hold.

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie!
 O, what a panic's in thy breastie
 Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi' bickerin' brattle;
 I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
 Wi' murd'ring prattle?

In a world which still enjoys the brutal chase, where even clergymen find pleasure in inflicting pain with the inhuman gun and rod, these

lines written a hundred years ago, on seeing a wounded hare limp by, should place Burns amongst the blessed of the earth:

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
 And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye;
 May never pity sooth thee with a sight,
 Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

* * * * *

Oft, as by winding Nith I musing wait
 The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,
 I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,
 And curse the ruffian's aim, and mourn thy
 hapless fate.

This was Robert Burns,—and yet Dumfries, which held this gentle soul within its walls, and the Protestant world of a hundred years ago, looked at John Calvin piling the faggots around Servetus' form, and knelt before him as a patron, religious saint, while they cast into outer darkness poor Robert Burns with his heart bowed down at the suffering of a wounded hare.

Will the world ever learn what true religion is? Will it ever learn that mercy and pity and charity are more in the sight of the Infinite than all the creeds and dogmas of the earth? Will it ever learn to believe this beautiful verse of Robert Burns:

But deep this truth impressed my mind,
 Through all his works abroad;
 The heart benevolent and kind,
 The most resembles God.

Will the world ever learn when it prays, to pray with Robert Burns, as man has seldom spoken to the Infinite, in whose unknown hands, we are as bubbles on the sea; to the

great power, which sends us forth into the darkness to stagger through a tangled maze for a little time and then calls us back to sleep within its all-embracing heart.

O thou, unknown, Almighty Cause
Of all my hope and fear!
In whose dread presence, ere an hour,
Perhaps I must appear!

If I have 'wandered in those paths
Of life I ought to shun;—
As something loudly in my breast
Remonstrates I have done;—

Thou know'st that Thou hast formed me
With passion wild and strong;
And list'ning to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.

Where human weakness has come short,
Or frailty step aside,
Do thou, All Good?—for such thou art
In shades of darkness hide.

Where with intention I have err'd,
No other plea I have
But, Thou art good! and goodness still
Delighteth to forgive!

Dear Robert Burns, to place one flower upon your grave, or add one garland to your fame is a privilege indeed. A noble man you were, knighted not by King or Queen, but titled by the Infinite Maker of us all. You loved the world; you loved all life; you were gentle, kind and true. Your works, your words, your deeds, will live and shine to teach the brotherhood of man, the kinship of all breathing things, and make the world a brighter, gentler, kindlier place because you lived and loved and sung.

GEORGE BURMAN FOSTER

[A Memorial Address by CLARENCE DARROW
Garrick Theater, Chicago, Sunday, Jan. 12, 1919]

It is hard to realize that George Burman Foster is dead. Even now, on this platform, where I have so often met him in debate, I feel that he will rise and speak; that I will see his tall frame and his Jove-like head—a beautiful head which shone as the light played around it and within it. He had the head of a god and the heart of a child.

Here we discussed the problems of life and death—and whether there was a purpose in it all. He said there was. But the answer is that George Burman Foster is dead and that his brain, today, is less potent than the puny babe's; that all that was stored within during a long and useful life, is dead.

Nature has found no way of passing the genius or character or learning of one generation to another. Every child, whether sired by a philosopher or an idiot, comes into the world without a scrap of knowledge and with a brain of clay. It must learn the whole lesson of life anew, the same as the first child that was ever born.

He and I debated the meaning of life. I remember hearing him say on this platform, in almost a burst of frenzy: "I am the captain of my soul!" But, George Burman Foster is dead! No man is captain of his soul; he is not even

a deck hand on a rudderless ship; he is a bubble cast up for an instant on an angry sea, then lost in the air and waves, to be seen no more.

I would not pretend to give his religious faith. He was puzzling; sometimes changeable, almost chimerical in his views; here and there perhaps not daring to follow his farthest thoughts as to faith and life and death.

I was at his memorial services some days ago in church. Theological gentlemen said that Foster was a religious man. I would not say that he was not. Whether he was, depends on the definition of religion. If religion means creeds and dogmas, he was not a religious man. If it means specific belief in a supreme being, he was not. If it means a firm conviction of immortal life, he still was not; but if it means infinite love, gentleness, charity and kindness to all living things, George Burman Foster was the most religious man I ever knew!

He sometimes seemed to me to hold fast to things of which his judgment did not approve. I have often heard him say from this platform—that the function of faith began where reason ended; that because you could not prove a thing, was the real reason for faith and he tried to cling fast to faith where reason could not aid. To me, this statement is without foundation in philosophy or fact. If faith could be bought like a suit of clothes, we might choose our faith. But it comes from some conviction; and to me, at least, it cannot be an act of will.

Of course, he believed in no personal god. But, if there is no personal god, there is no

god; and if there is no personal immortality, there is no immortality.

No man could quarrel with him as to his convictions. He was so tender and kindly, even to those with whom he disagreed, that often he left you with a belief that he felt and thought as you felt and thought. He was the fairest man in his attitude of mind that I ever knew. I seldom met him in debate that I did not afterwards apologize for something that I had said wherein I thought the lawyer had overcome the man. But, I can never remember the time where I thought any apology was due from him for any statement that was not absolutely fair and just. In fact, I used to think that he ought never to debate. His mind was so fair, so free that he knew there was no theory that could be proven true.

He knew that reason was as feeble as religion; and he knew that truth has many sides and many angles. He could state his opponent's side as fairly as he could his own, and when he had stated the question for debate, he had put my side as well or better than I could have stated it myself. A philosopher cannot be a partisan, and, of course, a partisan cannot be a philosopher. A Catholic, a Methodist, a Christian Scientist, a Socialist, or a Single Taxer, cannot be a philosopher. If he could be, he would understand the uncertainty of truth, the relationship of all things, the differences that all men give to values, the many-sidedness of the human mind and human things, and he never could content himself with one corner of the universe or one small creed.

George Burman Foster above all other things was an intellectual man and a philosopher; he could neither take sides with the religionist nor the rationalist, because he knew that religion furnished no means for getting at the truth. He likewise knew that the human intellect had left man just as he was born, with no chance to get at the eternal things of life. But, he did believe that the human feelings, emotions and intuitions of man are truer guides than religious systems or mental conclusions.

He was the wisest man that it was ever my fortune to know intimately. And in many ways, I never had a friend whom I will miss as much. When I talked with him on philosophy, I was always sure of a free, open discussion, and I always knew when he had finished that he had said the last word that could be spoken; that he said it openly, fairly, freely and with no bias of any sort. I never knew a man who could do this as Foster did.

I remember the last discussion I had with him. It was not a dispute, but one of those talks that men at our time of life have with each other, which we withhold more or less from the public. It was on the old time riddle: "If a man die, shall he live again?" As to what death meant and its deep importance to the world and the human race; how in every religion, the joy of life was overshadowed by the fear of death. On this he had no conviction. He had hope and he never gave it up. I am glad for him that he never gave it up, for life is hard to all; if there is any hope or dream or illusion, true or false to which man can cling, he

should cherish that hope or dream or illusion while he can. Death is the ever-present thing, and the thoughtful man with all his longings cannot blot it out.

For me I cannot go beyond the facts; and the lines of the "Shropshire Lad" tell how I feel:

"With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.
By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade."

At a time like this, the mortality of things is brought home to all and there is no chance to close our eyes. When one so near and dear is gone, the calamity has a personal tinge. It is as though you were standing by one in the trenches and a bullet, meant for you, had taken him.

George Burman Foster was one of the rarest men I ever knew. He was tolerant to all who lived. He was as broad as the human mind, and, what is better, as the human sympathies could make him. He had no use for any of the creeds that bind, and fetter man. He believed in freedom. He believed that the greatest thing was to be an individual and to live your own life unafraid. He was impatient of all those reformers who tell men what they must do and what they must not do. He did not believe in reforming by fear. He aroused the ire of the Prohibitionists because he said that a man should not be sent to jail for choosing what he should eat or drink. He would rather

a man lived free and wrong, than to be bound to the right. He knew that no man could be good unless he had a chance to be evil. And that without the actions of men at least seeming to be free, there could be no good conduct and no bad. He believed that men should make their own mistakes and blunders, and that their bodies and souls should be left unchained.

Few men who were ever born lived so bravely, thought so fearlessly, were so tolerant and kind and charitable to all, as our dead friend. As a philosopher, I never knew his equal. He had an intimate acquaintance with the works of all the great thinkers of the world. If he had never studied any books, he would have been a philosopher just the same. He had the habit of going to the bottom of every kind of teaching. He had a way of balancing one thing against another and trying to find out which after all was best and how far the mind could go before it reached the end of human knowledge.

There were things that he hated. You cannot love without hating, and he was not a colorless man; he had opinions on almost everything, but did not always offend you by stating them, nor did he always please you by giving them. I remember hearing him talk about a Prohibition procession that went down Michigan Avenue. He read the sign, "Down with Rum" on a banner and remarked: "Why is it in this Christian world, that you could not get a procession and have a banner that would say: 'Down with Anger,' or 'Down with Back-biting', or 'Down with Bearing False Witness

Against Your Neighbor', or 'Down with Nagging', or 'Down with Unkindness and Up with Charity or Love.' You could not get a dozen people in Chicago to march behind banners like that!" And, you could not.

Our friend taught us many lessons. He has given us the example of his great life. He was a joy to us while he lived and his memory will abide with most of us until the end. Yet he is dead, and I cannot reconcile it with any belief in the purpose of the universe. Talk of Omnipotence and the goodness of God, and I must answer: George Burman Foster is dead!

I have seen much of life and death. When useless men are saved and priceless ones like him lost to the world, I am not in harmony with the idea of eternal justice and a benign power. Life and death are facts and that is all. No mummery or ceremony can make death anything but death.

"There sun nor star shall waken,
Nor any change of light;
Nor sound of water shaken,
Nor any sound or sight.

Nor wintry leaves nor vernal
Nor days nor things diurnal,
Only the sleep eternal,
In an eternal night."

Is there any real hope in it all? I see little for those who feel and think. Housman gives us the only fleeting ray of light that life holds out to man. This he puts on the lips of his Shropshire Lad:

"Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,

And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

“Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

“And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.”

We have emotions and feelings, and all that is left for us, is to go and see “the cherries hung with snow”. Get what you can—get it kindly—because it is the best—but get it while the day is here for the night comes on apace. I can see no other philosophy of life and no other hope in it.

This is no great consolation for Foster's death. It is little for me who loved him as I seldom loved any other man. It seems to me that in the spring the grass and leaves will never be so green again; that summer will lose the golden hues that mark the ripening grain; that autumn leaves no more will have the old time glorious tints of red and brown. The winter will be longer and colder, and the summer be shorter now that he is dead. The stars in heaven will never shine so bright again. The day will lose its old time glory. The sun will fade faster, the twilight fall quicker, and the night close deeper since he is dead!

SOME PARAGRAPHS ADDRESSED TO SOCIALISTS

I would say that the ordinary Socialist—the ordinary Socialist; I do not mean Karl Marx or Trotsky—I mean the one, the one out of the million of the fellows who used to vote the Socialist ticket in the United States. I mean the ordinary one; they lay too great emphasis upon bread and butter, and they have taken their particular dope as containing the whole meaning of life; whereas, there are more things in the world than bread and butter, and a man must labor under some delusion if he thinks that he can live by bread alone. He can't, even if he throws in beefsteak. To the ordinary Socialist, as shown by all of his talk, and by all of his writing, the one great evil in the world is the lack of a practically equal distribution of property; or, at least, if property was fairly divided the world would be saved; and then we would all be happy.

Now, let's see what Socialism really is. To me, Socialism is a theory of political action, and economics. To you, Socialism is a religion, just a pure unadulterated dope. Now, let's see if I can prove it so that everybody will understand it excepting the Socialists. If I can I am satisfied.

Most all the Socialists I ever knew believe that this is a universe of law. They do not believe in a personal God, or any other, and I am not disputing on that question. Of course

they have certain patron saints, among whom is Karl Marx; and that does not bother me. They are materialists. They believe that when a man is dead he is dead all over.

Of course there is a certain sect which call themselves Christian Socialists, but I never saw any of them. I never saw any Socialist who could be a Christian, or any Christian who could be a Socialist. Because either dope is enough to fill anybody. If a man is drunk on whisky he does not need morphine. If he has morphine he does not need whisky.

The great mass of Socialists are materialists. The great mass of them are possessed of considerable intellect. I am not joking now. Of course I am not comparing you with myself, but I am comparing you with the common herd. And this is the reason I say you are intellectual.

You believe in the cooperative commonwealth; in a world where everything shall belong to everybody and nothing belongs to nobody; and I don't object to that. Of course this is rather a short definition of Socialism, which perhaps you could quibble over, but I am just putting it short.

Anyhow you believe in the cooperative commonwealth, where the product of every man will be dumped into the common pot, and each fellow draw out according to the amount of work he has done, or according to his needs.

Well, I shall not quarrel over that. I can imagine a state of society where a man's best title to property would be that he needed it, and as all of the laws in reference to property

are purely arbitrary, why, perhaps that would be as good as any. But I will state this, that no intelligent Socialist believes that any such state of society will come in the next ten generations. I am speaking of intelligent Socialists.

You believe in a state of society where the lowest strata of society will control the upper, and where all of us intellectuals will have to go to work, or starve.

Well, I am willing to take a chance on that. I am willing to starve. I don't agree that when we have Socialism work will be play, because when work is play, then it is not work. The distinguishing thing about work is that you do not want to do it. And when some sort of condition of psychology, or Socialism, makes it just as much fun to saw wood as to play golf, then sawing wood will no longer be work; but so far as we can see work will always be work, and I don't want it. . . .

Now, so far as Socialism affects your life today, it is because it is a dream, an idealism, a religion, nothing else. Why, I have known Socialists—some of them I see around me today—fathers in Israel, good fellows, they haven't been awake since I knew them. They never will awaken. They will die in their sleep. I don't object to it. I am glad of it. That is a fine way to die, and it is a bully good way to live. I don't object to it. But what I do say is this: that they are living upon an ideal; they are living upon a theory; they are living upon a dream; they are living upon a religion; they are taking dope. It has no relation to

actual, physical life. It is purely to them imaginary, and yet you are living on it now, and life perhaps is mostly an ideal. You are living on it, and you are dreaming of it, and wherever there is any human being who can live his life and get pleasure out of the dream that some day Socialism and justice will rule on the the earth, I say all right, go to it.

Practical Socialism is not a political theory; it is a religious doctrine. You are living upon religious dogma, just the same as the Christian Scientists are living on religious dogma. You are living on a narrow, sectarian doctrine, just as the Methodist is living on a narrow, sectarian doctrine; and when you look at a man with that far-off, dreamy look, and say, "Are you a Socialist?" it is just exactly the same as the liquid stare of the Salvation Army lassie, who looks into your eyes and says, "Do you love Jesus?"

Now, I am not quarreling with it. All I can say for myself is, that dope does not work on me. It is not enough. There are too many things in heaven and in earth—especially in the earth—for me to get fat over the thought that a thousand years from now the cooperative commonwealth will come. It is pure dope, so far as it affects the present-day life of any Socialist, and if you can live on it, well and good. It may cure the Socialists, but it won't cure the world. It may save those who take it; but suppose the Socialists came into power and would pass a law that it should be taken by the Christian Scientist, do you think it would save them? Or take the agnostics, or different people who

are awake, do you suppose if you would pass a law to that effect it would cure them, or save them? No. It will save those who can take it, and who can live on it, and that is all.

Let's see about this saving the world. Now, I am willing to concede for the sake of the argument, so my friend won't have too hard a job, that some time far in the future the world may evolve a state of society where everybody's highest good will be to see to the general good; and where he will be willing to dump his earnings and take pot luck with the rest; and, broadly speaking, that is a very good definition of Socialism; although some of you may not say I understand it. Perhaps I don't, but I am willing to concede that some time that will come; and, of course, I am willing to concede that it would be a higher state of society than the present catch-as-catch-can state of society that we live in now. Take all of that; but are we to be happy then? Is it the unequal distribution of wealth that is the greatest evil in the world? Is that the greatest question that can fill your mind? Is it the highest idealism that some time there will be an equal distribution of wealth? I think not.

Now, everybody knows himself better than he does anybody else. At least he ought to. He might try not to, but he ought to. So, I will take myself for an example, and assume that the rest of you are the same way—which you are not. For thirty years I suppose I have had more money out of this crazy patch-work system than I could have had out of a co-operative commonwealth. I would have been

behind if I had dumped my earnings—or rather my gettings. I want to convince you that I am a real Socialist. I would have been behind if I had dumped these into the common mass, and taken out my per capita share; and yet I have always been more or less a Socialist. The capitalists say I have been more; the Socialists say I have been less. So I have been more or less. But I have always been willing to dump them in; at least, I have said so. It was so far away I didn't see any great danger. And I have had probably two or three times as much money and as much food, clothes, to say nothing about other things, as I would have been able to get had I taken pot luck with the rest. And yet, I have not been happy.

Now, what's the matter? Why haven't I been happy? Why, I have had more than I could possibly get under the cooperative commonwealth. I have had plenty to eat. One thing that made me unhappy sometimes was too much to eat. I have had plenty to eat. I have had plenty of clothes to wear; I have had a good house and I have been able to have some luxuries that I could not have had under the cooperative commonwealth, and still I am not happy. In fact, I am not sure that I am any happier than I was when I had very much less; and that is not due to age, because age does not make me less happy. In fact, it makes me more reconciled, because I know I won't have to stick around so long.

The reason I am not perfectly happy is because the bread and butter question is not the whole of life. In fact, when we get that settled,

we think it is no part of life. I still am able to have debts. While I can get money I can buy gold bricks with it, and fool it away. I am still able to look around and find people that are better off than I am and to want something else; and then the real things in life that worry me, I have not touched at all, and money cannot reach them. They are these simple things which lurk in the human mind more than the body; they are the everlasting questions which, after all, affect men more than anything else.

You Socialists here today talk about Socialism. If there was somebody in the next block that could show the people by an absolute demonstration that they were going to live forever nobody would be interested in Socialism for a single moment.

Those eternal problems of life and death are so much bigger than all the economic problems that nobody would think of the economic problems if there was any solution for them; and so, if you people are going to take dope, and can choose your dope, choose religious dope, it is bigger, it will go farther, because Socialism at the best can only affect a very short time, whereas religious dope can affect eternity.

Of course I have been happy at moments; I have had my—not my lucid intervals—but my illucid intervals when I was happy. If my lucid intervals only would not come back, I would be happy all the time; but they keep coming back.

There are a lot of things that annoy me. There are the misfortunes of others. Now, you

Socialists say, "Well, if we had Socialism they would not have misfortunes." Oh, yes, they would. They would have cancers, and I would rather be as poor as the average working man—who, by the way, is not a Socialist—he is just a working man. You people are just kidding yourselves into believing that you work. You are Socialists. I would rather be as poor as the average working man than to have a cancer, or tuberculosis, or any of the physical troubles which are the common lot of common men; and yet, when I look around me, I see that from the nature of things nobody can be happy very long, and I could not be happy even if I lived in Mrs. Potter Palmer's house. By the way, she is dead now, although she lived in a good house. I am not specially mentioning her name, but the house occurred to me.

Of course one thinks that these material things in life are the things that count; but they do not count. About as soon as a man gets everything fixed up and builds himself a fine, new house, the first great function he attends there is his own funeral.

My troubles in this world have never had any connection with food, except I have had too much of it. It might here and there give me the gout; and you poor people are lucky because you don't have the gout. They are the miseries and troubles inherent in life that Socialism can't cure. They are the everlasting annoyances that are present all the time.

The mosquitoes bother me. The reformers. The gossips; all kinds of fool people that look after other people's business; and they will

have more time when we get Socialism, for then they won't have anything else to do.

Then there are those people who are my pet aversion, the Prohibitionists. They bother me. And that kind of people never stop. Why, just the other day when I saw that the prohibition amendment had carried in the United States, I said to myself, "Well, all right, I am glad of it; we will get rid of the Prohibitionists." Then I picked up the papers the next day, and I found they had started on a crusade to make the world dry. I found we had got Prohibition, and I looked in the paper and found we still had the damn prohibitionists.

So what are you going to do about it? Nothing. You know happiness is a mental condition. To quote Karl Marx, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." Any kind of dope that will work on you will save the world for you. It saves it by its effect on you, that is all. It can't be saved by external medicine, or internal medicine. You can only do it by some delusion or hallucination, which takes possession of you, and by which you live; and whether it is Christian Science, or Single Tax, or Theosophy, or Free Silver, or Socialism, it all accomplishes the same result. . . .

Is Socialism in its organized form coming in this day and generation?

Now, there are a lot of you who honestly think so. I would not object if it did. But to say that it can is to deny all human history, and all that man can learn of science, and of life. The human race cannot be made over in a generation.

The rich men, if intelligent—and most of them are not—they are not afraid of any immediate Socialism in the world; they are not afraid of a general state of anarchy and disorder, such as is sweeping over the world to-day. Now I don't stand with them on that question. I am neutral. Anything is better than peace. They were just as afraid of the French Revolution. Socialism was not born out of the Revolution. Something better no doubt came out of it, but the dream of Socialism, no.

Why, you could not get a Socialist government that could stand together twenty-four hours. Now, you ask me who could understand this question better, a capitalist who was a part of it, or the working man who was a part of it, or I, who am looking on? I tell you I, and you Socialists don't seem to know that you could not get a Socialist government that would hang together. Every blooming one of you is an orator, and a boss, and you would not be satisfied to let anybody else have anything to do with it. Not for a minute. It is like the French Revolution. When I read the story the thing that impressed me was not that they cut off the heads of the noblemen, but they wound up the job by cutting off each other's heads.

Change does not come that way. It may be an element in it, but you put a brand new party, Socialism, down on the earth, according to program, and it would last just about as long as a snowball—no longer. It takes men women, ideas—and those are of slow development and slow change, and slow growth; and they don't come out of theories, and political orators.

